

## Editorial Notes

### Murray Edmond

In this issue we mark the death of Rowley Habib (Rore Hapipi) with a memorial notice from Brian Potiki and some excerpts from Habib's letters to Potiki and an interview they conducted in 2010. Rowley Habib was a poet and a dramatist and short story writer. His poem 'The Raw Men' is one of the signature pieces of Aotearoa poetry in the 1960s, just as his play *The Death of the Land* has the same kind of status for Māori drama in the 1970s. His own O-A-Tia publishing venture put out a selected poems in 2006, *The Raw Men: Selected Poems 1954-2004*. Born in 1935, Rowley fits into a generation of poets whose childhoods and school years were spent in and round the time and aftermath of the Second World War. A number of other poets from this generation have published collected or selected editions of their poetry over the last 15 years. Amongst these we may include:

Iain Lonie (1932-1988), *A Place To Go On From: Collected Poems* (Dunedin: Otago UP, 2015)

Kevin Ireland (1933 - ), *Selected Poems 1963-2013* (Wellington: Steele Roberts, 2013)

Peter Bland (1934 - ), *Collected Poems 1956-2011* (Wellington: Steele Roberts, 2013)

Rowley Habib (1935-2016), *The Raw Men: Selected Poems 1954-2004* (O-A-Tia Publishing, 2006)

Martyn Sanderson (1938-2009), *Like Smoke in a Wheelbarrow* (Wellington: Steele Roberts, 2013)

Riemke Ensing (1939- ), *Talking Pictures: Selected Poems* (Wellington: Headworx, 2000)

David Mitchell (1940-2011), *Steal Away Boy: Selected Poems* (Auckland: Auckland UP, 2010)

Mark Young (1941- ), *Pelican Dreaming: Poems 1959-2008* (San Francisco: Meritage P, 2008)

Taken together these volumes add up to a sizeable output. They do not in any way constitute a school or even a loosely related grouping. However, might one venture to say something collectively about this group of poets? Perhaps such a venture might contain some characteristics as follow. First, they share a condition of being relatively unacknowledged. They are emblematic of what Roger Horrocks, in his 'Introduction' to his collection *Re-inventing New Zealand* (Atuanui P, 2016) has recently described as "an awkward, in-between group, in contrast to the famous generation of 'the thirties'" (p.10). Second, they seem to be

deeply *uninvolved* in literary politics compared to their predecessors, either the Critical Nationalists (Curnow, Brasch et al) or their rebellious inheritors (the anti-Critical Nationalists, Baxter, Smithyman et al). In this context, the careers of Karl Stead (b.1932) and Fleur Adcock (b.1934) seem to belong more readily with those predecessors. One instance of an intervention in the politics of literature that should be acknowledged is Riemke Ensing's editing of the first New Zealand anthology of women's poetry, *Private Gardens* (1977). Third, though Sanderson and Bland, and Habib too, to a lesser extent, were involved in theatre, and though Ireland and Habib and Bland have written fiction, the work of these eight is remarkable for its singular focus on poetry. Fourth, we may note that, although Ensing tutored in English for many years at Auckland University and Iain Lonie was a Classics scholar who taught at Otago for some years, the grouping is largely devoid of academic or critical work. And, finally, Rowley Habib is the only Māori poet amongst the eight. Important Māori poets whose publishing history is coeval with Habib's, Hone Tuwhare and Jacqui Sturm, were both born in the 1920s.

The world that these poets began working and publishing in was the 1950s, with all that that period implies. In New Zealand the 1950s lasted a long time, easily as long as two decades. We may count from 1945, because the GIs had left behind a taste for American culture which would be the signature of the '50s, cars, boogie-woogie and swing then later rock 'n roll, suburbia (the kind of thing Bill Pearson disapproved of in his 'Fretful Sleepers' essay) right through until . . . well, that is a question. Holyoake's defeat in 1972 certainly brought an era to an end (Holyoake had been Sid Holland's deputy and Holland was, politically, the heart of 1950s New Zealand). In his essay in this issue, John Newton notes the struggle that the key figures of Critical Nationalism (Curnow, Sargeson, Glover, Fairburn) had to produce work that matched their pre-Second World War output, or even to produce work at all. Those writers had all known another time and place, but for those beginning in the 1950s, this was all the world they knew. It might be a productive exercise, for some future researchers, to discover how the early work of these 'beginners' reflects those difficult and extensive 1950s. The first issue of *The Journal of New Zealand Literature* for 2016 looks at the period from 1975 to 2000; perhaps it is also time to take an overview of the period from 1945 to 1970 (1972?).

This issue of *Ka Mate Ka Ora* was intended to be devoted to the topic of 'poetry and war.' As it has developed, that theme has become just part of the contents. Ricci van Elburg's and Michele Leggott's essays are about the poetry of wartime. Van Elburg brings us close up to the reality of poetry production in the extreme situation of wartime occupation and dangerous resistance. Michele Leggott has unearthed a poet, Matthew Fitzpatrick, from the British Imperial armed forces in Taranaki in the 1860s. The revelation in May 2016 that the present Mayor of New Plymouth, Andrew Judd, would not seek re-election because of the relentless abuse he had been subjected to for suggesting that the city council should make provision for Māori representation, demonstrated that the settler attitudes of the 1860s remain alive and well in Taranaki in 2016. As Judd pointed out, if such racist attitudes remain so widespread in the Pākehā community, then the Te Āti Awa Settlement would constitute only a financial one, but not a real settlement based on true reparation and reconciliation. It was particularly telling to hear Judd report that a National politician had told him that: "The loser must follow

the laws of the victor.” This gives some indication of the how Te Tiriti o Waitangi is actually regarded by the power elite.

Both Vaughan Rapatahana’s and Makyla Curtis’s contributions address the interaction of Māori and Pākehā through the negotiation of two languages, Te Reo Māori and English. There is evidence that English is a world-wide hydra consuming other languages (90% of all scientific papers are now presented in English) and thus placing languages such as Māori, whose survival, with a small number of speakers, is fragile, in great jeopardy; and there is also evidence that the English used in Aotearoa/New Zealand is changing with some of this change coming from the influence of Māori. Whether this is a case of war between two languages or some kind of unevenly brokered peace is the question that haunts both Rapatahana’s and Curtis’s work.

John Newton’s essay engages with the work of Allen Curnow, whom Newton rightly describes as “our most accomplished modernist poet.” Writing always in English and editing the iconic anthology *The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse* in 1960, containing poetry in both Māori and English, Curnow’s publishing career covered seven decades and he always made a point of keeping in touch with the shifts and changes of language and style that accompanied him. Newton’s discussion provides a considered tracking of Curnow’s evolving poetic strategies as well as the shape-shifting chimera of poetry in Aotearoa through most of the twentieth century.